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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000027

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SUBJECT: THE NLD SUGGESTS A TRIPARTITE "SUPREME BODY"

REF: RANGOON 15

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Classified By: P/E Chief W. Patrick Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Burma's leading opposition party, the NLD, recently floated a proposal for a "supreme leading body"--comprised of the military regime, political parties, and ethnic nationalities--to govern a transition to democracy. Although the NLD has no specific plan for the proposal, party leaders say their intent is to offer the regime a "de jure" role in a future transitional government. The generals have long rejected dialogue and would likely dismiss the idea with scorn. Although NLD party leaders have no expectation that the regime will join them in negotiations, this latest, even if vague, offer shows their willingness to consider new ways to bring the country back together. End Summary.

Floating a New, If Vague, Idea

12. (C) On January 9 P/E Chief met with NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe and Secretary U Lwin to discuss the party's statements on Burma's Independence Day (reftel) and recent international developments concerning Burma. In the NLD Chairman's Speech on January 4, the party had called for the formation of a "supreme leading body"--comprised of the SPDC, political parties, and ethnic nationalities--to effect Burma's transition to democracy. Although the NLD has previously supported the notion of a tripartite political dialogue among these entities, this was the party's first mention of a "supreme leading body" to govern the process.

13. (C) According to U Lwin, the NLD has not yet developed a specific plan for a "supreme body," nor has it officially shared its proposal with the governing military regime. The party, however, made its vague announcement on January 4 as a public "offer" to the regime. U Lwin said that the NLD's

previous appeals for dialogue or transitional mechanisms have offered the SPDC a "de facto" role. "We want the generals to know," said U Lwin, "that they can have a full, de jure position in a transitional government." He added that, although the NLD has been unable to communicate with detained party leader Aung San Suu Kyi on this specific proposal, ASSK "has always supported efforts to achieve a meaningful dialogue."

¶4. (C) U Aung Shwe said that the sole function of the tripartite "supreme body" would be to convene a Parliament, based on Burma's existing Constitution. After a new Parliament was in place, he added, the "supreme body" would disband. He described the "supreme body" as "the only chance for the country's survival," opining that the deterioration of the economy, as well as declining living standards for most Burmese, means that time is running out for the possibility of a smooth and stable transition to democracy.

¶5. (C) When queried on the regime's response to the NLD proposal, Aung Shwe chuckled and said, "They are too busy with their move to Pyinmana." U Lwin added, however, that the NLD would not ask for statements of support for their proposal from Washington or other capitals at this time. "We need to see first if the generals intend to react in any way either to our proposal or to the ASEAN decision to send a delegation to Rangoon."

¶6. (U) Note: The NLD's "Chairman Speech" of January 4 stated, in part: "It is not realistic to expect to reach our objectives (for democracy and freedom) instantaneously. We must go through a transitional period... For this matter, it is now urgently required to take action for the formation of a supreme leading body comprising the current authority the

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State Peace and Development Council, the representatives of the political parties which were mandated by the people in the 1990 elections, and the forces of ethnic nationalities." U Lwin delivered the Chairman's Speech, while U Aung Shwe read the NLD party statement, which made no mention of a "supreme body." End Note.

Friends Get No Better Treatment

¶7. (C) U Aung Shwe and U Lwin agreed that spirits were high at political opposition events on Independence Day (reftel). They both attributed renewed energy among party members to the attention that the UN Security Council and ASEAN had recently given Burma. U Lwin said that while the NLD was enthusiastic that ASEAN had agreed to send a delegation to Burma early this year, led by Malaysian FM Hamid, party leaders were surprised that the GOB subsequently appeared to be reneging on the ASEAN consensus. They noted that the regime routinely deflected overtures by the international community, but that the SPDC needed ASEAN now more than ever. "You just can't predict these people (the generals)," said U Lwin. "Of course, he added, "They've broken every promise they've ever made."

Comment: Taking the High Road

¶8. (C) If the SPDC responds at all to the NLD's call for the formation of a "supreme body," it is likely to dismiss the idea with scorn. The generals have long rejected any dialogue or mechanism that accords opposition political parties and ethnic nationalities a level playing field. NLD party leaders have no expectation that the regime will join them at the negotiating table any time soon, but this new proposal allows them to still show their willingness to consider new ways to bring the country back together. End Comment.

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